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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

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## Editorial

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### THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE COLLEGES

That great progress has been made in the study of the Bible in the colleges of the country in the last quarter-century no one at all familiar with the facts can for a moment doubt. The opportunities for such study have been greatly increased, better textbooks provided, and the number of students availing themselves of these opportunities multiplied many fold. For this progress, a large share of the credit must be given to the Young Men's Christian Association, ably seconded by the Young Women's Christian Association. College officers have in many cases heartily co-operated with the associations, in some notable cases have been independently active; but it is but just to say that in most institutions the influence which has resulted in the growth of Bible-study has come not from the faculty but from outside the college, and the colleges have somewhat tardily swung into line. Today, in a large number of institutions, faculty, students, and association officers are working harmoniously for the same end, the promotion of Bible-study with a view to the development of Christian intelligence and character.

So much having been done, it may seem that there is no room today for criticism but only for rejoicing. On the contrary, so much remains to be accomplished that what has been done only furnishes a reason for building larger and stronger on the foundation already laid. In a majority of the colleges of the country most of the systematic Bible-study done by students is carried on under student leaders and of course without college credit, or any recognized place in the college curriculum. Excellent as this is, it is far from being an ideal situation. In the first place the amount of work falls far

below the demands of the subject. One who reads that 30,000 or 40,000 students are studying the Bible in American colleges in Y. M. C. A. classes may conclude that more could not be desired. But if he goes behind the returns, he will find that many of the units in this total 40,000 represent a very small amount of work: an attendance at perhaps twelve meetings of the class, or perhaps only six, or possibly only registration at a Bible-study rally with no subsequent work. Even college statistics are subject to some discount for students who registered for a course, but fell out by the way. How inevitable it is that this discount must be far larger in an organization which has no power to enforce attendance on its classes, and no scrutiny of the statistics of registration by a competent superior authority. And aside from all inflation of statistics, what do these figures represent? One meeting a week for which little or no preparation is made, even if continued through the college course, is all too little. But this is rarely or never the case. The year is shortened at the beginning and at the end, and few students continue the study more than one or at the most two years. Yet more serious than the shortness of the course is the incompetence of the instructors. Religion is not so simple a thing, and the problems of the Bible student are not so easy to deal with that, while thoroughly trained men, employed at the highest salary which the college can afford to pay, are needed to teach the classics and mathematics and the sciences, the teaching of the Bible can be left to untrained or self-trained undergraduates. Much as has been done under just this system, it should be simply a stepping-stone to something far better. There is always danger that the good shall be the enemy of the better, instead of its forerunner. It is this danger that we ought now to recognize and avoid.

How then shall the situation be met? Comprehensively stated, by hearty co-operation and intelligent differentiation of function. What the colleges can do best, the colleges ought to do. What the associations can do best, they should undertake. This means in the first place that the colleges ought to give to the Bible and related subjects a place in the curriculum commensurate with their importance, and provide thoroughly competent instructors to teach these subjects. At present the college fills up the student's schedule of

hours with mathematics, literature, and science, too often offering him no courses in the Bible, in the fundamental principles of Christianity or the facts of Christian history, contenting itself with the fact that the Christian associations offer some optional hour-a-week courses under student leaders. The college virtually says to its students that it isn't worth while for them to study these subjects seriously. Even the courses in Christian evidence and the relation of Christianity to natural religion which were common in Christian colleges a generation or two ago have disappeared. The result is a most unfortunate ignorance of the fundamental facts of the Christian religion on the part of the present and recent generations of college students. An intelligent lawyer in a large city recently said that there was no subject in which the business and professional men of his acquaintance were more deeply interested, and of which they more keenly regretted their ignorance, than the fundamental questions of religion. These men, many of them college graduates, had had not only no encouragement from their colleges to study these things, but no opportunity even. In times past our state universities have been under some embarrassment in this matter. That day is rapidly passing, even for them. But for the denominational college and the university not under state control there is no embarrassment, and no adequate excuse for failure to offer courses, under as able men as the faculty contains, in the Bible, the central elements of Christianity, and at least an outline course in the history and present status of the Christian church.

Does this mean, then, the elimination of the Christian Association from the field of Bible-study in the colleges? Far from it. Their work there has been invaluable in the past and is indispensable in the present. In the first place, they have still a mission in doing as well as they can, what the colleges ought to do well but are not doing at all. And in the second place they will always be needed, not only in the promotion of religious life on its devotional side, and of religious activity, but in the promotion of Bible-study. There are obvious reasons why the professor of biblical literature and Christian history cannot systematically solicit students to enter his classes, and desirable as it is that students should take these courses, it is doubtful whether the college should as a rule make them required.

It is scarcely less obvious that there is a need, which does not exist, to the same degree at least, in the case of other studies, for some constraining influence to draw students into these courses. The average college student thinks he knows the Bible because he has attended Sunday school from childhood. If he has not been a Sunday-school pupil he is all the more certain to think that the Bible is not worth studying. Really ignorant of much that he ought to know, and how interesting and profitable such study becomes under competent teaching, he has acquired a distaste for it and prejudice against it. Here is a legitimate and useful field of effort for the Christian Associations. They have done excellent work in introducing voluntary extra-curriculum study. But this can never be adequate and the association can never do the work of instruction, which it belongs to the college to provide. Having wrought so well thus far, their next opportunity and duty is to confess the inadequacy of present conditions, and to urge upon the colleges to take over this work which belongs to them, and to do competently what no agency coming from outside or conducted by the students themselves can ever do as its importance demands that it shall be done.

It is not less clearly the duty of our colleges without waiting for stimulus from the association to provide competent instructors in the Bible, the fundamentals of Christianity, and the elements of Christian history, and to encourage all their students to include such courses in their election of studies. The period of neglected opportunity on the part of the colleges and of vicarious service on the part of the Association ought speedily to give place to one of cordial co-operation and differentiation of function according to the responsibility and ability of each.